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National Intelligence Estimate

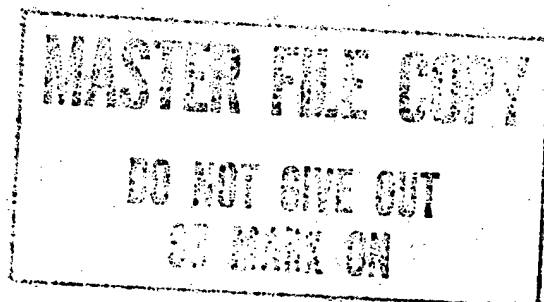
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Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe Under Gorbachev

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Key Judgments



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The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Treasury.

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The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

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SOVIET POLICY TOWARD EASTERN
EUROPE UNDER GORBACHEV

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KEY JUDGMENTS

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KEY JUDGMENTS

General Secretary Gorbachev's policies have increased the potential for instability in Eastern Europe. But they have also expanded the scope for diversity and experimentation, affording new possibilities for evolutionary reform in the region.

Gorbachev has set an ambitious agenda for Eastern Europe. His aims are to secure East European support for the Soviet modernization drive, promote broader Soviet foreign policy objectives through closer Warsaw Pact coordination, and stimulate a deeper process of economic and political regeneration in the region. Aware of the region's diversity, he has set general guidelines for reform rather than detailed plans. But he faces East European realities—severe economic problems, aging leaderships, and mounting social discontent—that conflict with Soviet objectives.

Soviet policy under Gorbachev has sought to balance the competing objectives of encouraging change and promoting stability. Although Gorbachev has avoided a high-risk strategy of forcing change on these fragile political systems, continuing Soviet pressure, as well as the example of the Soviet reform program, has introduced new tensions into the region.

Growing Diversity, Sharper Conflict

For the next three to five years, Eastern Europe's outlook is for growing diversity—in responding to reform pressures, crafting approaches to the West, and managing relations with Moscow:

- Economically, Eastern Europe cannot deliver what Gorbachev wants. As the gap between goals and results grows more acute, Gorbachev is likely to exert stronger pressure on his allies to forge closer economic ties, upgrade performance, and implement domestic economic reforms.
- While the recent leadership change in Hungary probably comes close to Gorbachev's preferences for Eastern Europe, prospective successions elsewhere are not likely to yield the dynamic, innovative leaders Gorbachev needs to achieve his more ambitious goals in the region. Consequently, his pressures for change will continue to be aimed at regimes ill-equipped and, in some cases, unwilling to respond.

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Thus, at best, Gorbachev's approach can achieve only evolutionary progress toward political rejuvenation and improved economic performance in Eastern Europe. Continued, and probably heightened, Soviet pressure will lead to sharper conflicts, both within East European societies and between Moscow and its allies.

Potential Challenges to Soviet Control

Cross-pressures emanating from Moscow, coupled with severe economic and political dilemmas in Eastern Europe, could yield more serious challenges to Soviet interests. Three extreme scenarios are possible:

- *Popular upheaval* in Poland, Romania, or Hungary, involving a broad-based challenge to party supremacy and ultimately to Soviet control.
- *Sweeping reform* in Hungary or Poland, going well beyond Gorbachev's agenda and eventually threatening to erode party control.
- *Conservative backlash*, involving open repudiation of Soviet policies by orthodox leaders in East Germany, Romania, or elsewhere.

Of these, popular upheaval is the most likely contingency. Gorbachev will expect his allies to act decisively to end any political violence or major unrest. Indeed, East European leaders are at least as aware of the need for vigilance as Gorbachev is, and they have at their disposal powerful security forces that have proved effective in containing unrest. Should events spin out of their control and beyond the limits of Soviet tolerance, the ultimate controlling factor on change in Eastern Europe will be Soviet force:

- Gorbachev faces greater constraints than did his predecessors against intervening militarily in Eastern Europe; his foreign policy and arms control agenda, and much of his domestic program as well, would be threatened.
- A Dubcek-like regime would have much greater latitude to pursue reforms now than in 1968, and Soviet intervention to stop it would be more problematic.
- In extremis, however, there is no reason to doubt his willingness to intervene to preserve party rule and decisive Soviet influence in the region.

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Implications for the United States

Gorbachev's sanctioning of diversity and experimentation have expanded the limits of the thinkable in Eastern Europe, presenting new opportunities for US and Western policies:

- Economic dilemmas and high-technology requirements will lend strength to US calls for internal reforms of the kind already legitimized by Moscow.
- Gorbachev's active European policy and the generally more dynamic period of East-West relations will offer new opportunities for the West to engage even the more conservative East European regimes.

At the same time, Gorbachev's policies will complicate the coordination of Western policies toward European security. Differing Western approaches will make it harder for Western governments to reach a political consensus on dealing with Moscow and its allies, and harder for NATO to maintain a security consensus.

Gorbachev's policies also call into question some of the assumptions upon which the US policy of differentiation is based, in that the twin US goals of diversity and liberalization increasingly collide. Those regimes most at odds with Gorbachev's approach also tend to be the most orthodox and repressive, and the reform-minded Hungarians and Poles are now closely attuned to the Soviet line. In practice, however, our ability to influence the grand alternatives—reform or retrenchment, crisis or stability—will remain limited; we can at best encourage evolutionary movement toward internal liberalization and greater independence from Soviet tutelage.

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